

## **Family's Economic Problems, Environmental Stability & Youth Delinquency in Society: Sociological Perspectives**

Irza Hanie Abu Samah<sup>1</sup>, Abdul Shukor Shamsudin<sup>2</sup> & Mohd Sufino Zuhaily<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Business Innovation and Technopreneurship, Universiti Malaysia Perlis  
&

<sup>2</sup>School of Business Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia

### **Corresponding Author:**

Irza Hanie Abu Samah

Universiti Malaysia Perlis, School of Business Innovation and Technopreneurship, Jalan Alor  
Setar-Kangar, 01000 Kangar, Perlis, Malaysia

Tel: +6049797729/+60122520945

Email: [irzahanie@unimap.edu.my](mailto:irzahanie@unimap.edu.my)/ irzahanie@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

The sociological perspective on youth delinquency has been widely discussed by researchers and sociologist. However, youth delinquency in the society remains constant and there is no one theory that can fit to fix the problem. This paper stressed on the youth delinquency in society that is explained through sociological theories with family's socioeconomic status and environmental stability as factors to delinquent behaviors. This paper shows the link of theories of delinquent behavior with economic problems that causes instability in the environment. Nonetheless, the discussion provided in this study is limited towards family economic problems and environmental instability; therefore more aspect are required to further study the factors of youth delinquency as it is important for every country to have healthy youth and free from criminal activities for the future development of a country.

**Keyword:** economic problem, family, youth delinquency behavior

## INTRODUCTION

The challenges of developing countries increase as modernization occur. Therefore; for countries that strives for a capitalist economy will have to face the circumstances, whether or not the accessibility to such development is available to their citizens. These create issues whereby income disparity becomes prevalent within the society. As of result, creates a clash of interest for those who cannot adapt to the fast pace of modernization with those who can. The clash of interests creates two different worldview where different societal norms (traditional and modern) are induced between the groups and creates tensions, as both groups competes for the limited resources available due to the modernization. As economic fluctuation occurs (during the modernization phase), the lack of mutual understanding between the groups leads to delinquent behaviors amongst the youth(Bradley, 2012), due to state of the economic problems that they are in (whether low or high income), as needs such as physiological, safety, belonging and esteem are not met (Agnew, 1985; Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2005). Therefore, the paper will stress on the sociological aspect that explain on economic situation upon youth delinquency and provide the understanding of youth delinquency in the society.

## THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Economy is the determinant of a country's stability and power, and its condition changes from time to time across the world. Henceforth, the constant change in the conditions creates instability in the environment where youths are trying to adapt, in order to survive. Somehow, the means for them to survive can be in two different forms which are legitimate acquisition of resources or illegitimate acquisition (delinquent behavior) (Martin, 2005). According to Martin (2005) in the article; delinquency behavior that is affected by the societal environment can be explained in the theories of *Anomie & Strain*, *Social Ecological*, and *Differential Association*. These three theories explain that delinquent behavior occurs due to the changes of economic and environmental conditions that leads to inequality, change in societal norms, and underclass condition (poverty, neighborhood degeneration, inadequate housing, family dysfunction); where these conditions are caused by the family's low socioeconomic status (poor family background and low income) (Jacob, 2011; White & Cunneen, 2002).

### *i) Anomie theory*

The first theory that explains juvenile delinquency is the Anomie theory. The Anomie theory was developed by Emile Durkheim during the nineteenth century and reveals a concept of *normlessness* (Martin, 2005). *Normlessness* is defined as, people that behave differently from the society or occurrence in deviation of the norm in the society; due to the vague or ambiguous situation. The deviation of norms creates individuals that are disconnected from the societal norms; therefore, are more prone to delinquent behaviors (status, property and violent crimes). A study conducted by Cochran & Bjerregard (2012), found that family disruption and low expenditure on education will lead to criminal behavior; furthermore, it is shown that if the family institution fails, then, the instability of the family's socioeconomic status may lead to frustrations, as the youth is unable to gain access and achieve societal goals (Zembroski, 2011). The failure to achieve and access these societal goals (failure of family institution) disrupt the youth's developmental period which makes them more prone towards aggressive behavior which triggers the possibility to juvenile delinquency (Flannery et al., 2005).

### *ii) Strain theory*

The second theory of juvenile delinquency is through the strained theory. The base of this theory is that delinquency happens, when an individual is not able to achieve their goals (immediate goals) through legitimate channels (Agnew, 1985; Martin, 2005). This is because, the means or channels of achieving such goals (or opportunities) are not equally (or inaccessible) given to everyone (despite societal standards that everyone should have similar life goals) (Zembroski, 2011). Henceforth, builds pressure to those who have limited access to it (goals); which, resorts them to use illegitimate methods (property crime or violent crime) to achieve these desirable goals. Furthermore, a study done by Agnew et al. (2008) explains that youths tend to indulge in illegal activities when resources such as money is limited since it reduces their opportunities for social activities (hanging out with friends, party, social status and commodities).

### *iii) Social Ecological Theory*

The third theory is a Social Ecological Theory, which explains the complex impact of structural changes (in the community), such as, overcrowding of immigrant, poverty, unemployment, high rate of wedlock child, inadequate transportation and housing with criminal behaviors. This is because the impact on the structural conditions aforementioned, leads to prevalent social instability within the community (Martin, 2005); such as, industrialization of suburban area, where factories and industrial complex (warehouses, shops, pawn shops and cheap theaters) creates, an unsafe and unhealthy (health hazards, chemicals, and smog) net around the community. Thus, this deteriorates the social environment within the housing community, creating disorganization within the environment (access to transport, health, and education) which increases the tendency for higher crime rate; as unwanted (lower SES people and immigrants) outsiders starts to occupy the area introducing unhealthy behavior into the community. The deterioration also makes the place to be undesirable to live; hence, creating

migration of the current community out of the area (Reid, 2008). However, those with low income and less access to resources will have to stay because of their inability to migrate out; therefore, increasing the tendency of higher crime (or juvenile delinquency) rates due to unstable social environment.

#### *iv) Differential Association theory*

The final theory that links juvenile delinquency with the economic problem is the theory proposed by Shoemaker (1994), where he emphasizes that delinquency is linked to the imitation and interaction of the behavior with the society. The reason behind this can be explained through social learning theory, where people learn social behavior through observation and imitation. Therefore, it means that, through personal choice, it is up to the individual to whether or not the pursuit criminal behavior as a part of their personal development (Aronson et. Al., 2005). This is because, more delinquent behavior is a collective experience where it is learned through interactions and communications of small groups within the society (Jenning & Gunther, 2001). Henceforth linking this theory to economic conditions with youth delinquency; as possibilities of violent crimes or property crime within the areas which are prevalent with family's that are facing poverty and financial difficulties are higher (Agnew et al., 2008). Thus, youth that lives in a high crime rate area (red light district, industrial area, and etc.) are more likely to learn or imitate criminal behavior (through their surroundings) that leads to juvenile delinquency. However, as differential theory states, such actions are not automatic (imitating their elderly) but rather by choice of social acceptance (acceptance into delinquent groups).

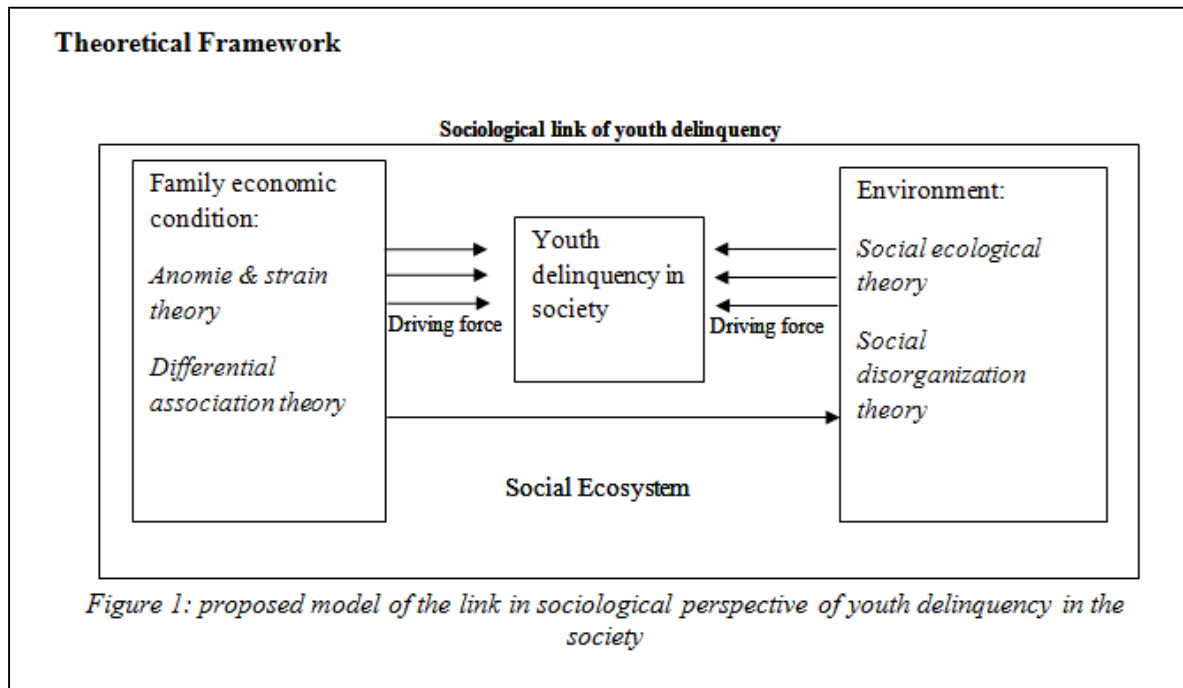
The aforementioned theory explains briefly of the economic fluctuation as a factor for delinquent behavior among the youth in the society. White & Cunneen (2002) emphasize that youth crime or delinquency is reflected from the social inequalities that come from the economic structure. However, not all youth delinquency happens equally in societies, since only certain societal surroundings (low socioeconomic environment) creates an impact due to the economic structural changes, will exhibit these delinquent behaviors (Kurbin, 2009). This is because the changes to the environment that alters the economic structure of the family institution shapes continuous delinquency behavior in the youths. Furthermore, family economic alteration is triggered by a conflict arises such as unemployment, divorce, bankruptcy, parental attitude towards substance abuse, and parental criminality (Reid, 2008). It begins with the family norm and value on how they develop and raise their children to stand in the society. The family with the lifestyle that involves in criminality, will have the tendency of youth to act delinquently as family holds a responsibility in upbringing their children (Jenning& Gunther, 2001). Shoemaker (1994), further explains that the issues of family economic problem happen because they are unable to; equip the basic need such as food, shelter, medication; engage with the activities and to achieve the goal; settle all debt and loan (Agnew et al., 2008). These conditions burden the family; therefore creates stress and tensions, as adequate resources are not met.

#### *v) Social Disorganization Theory.*

Social disorganization theory emphasizes that cohesiveness and strong bonds of the society reduces the crime rate in a neighborhood. However, the opposites (where lack of cohesiveness and bonds) will lead to higher crime rates; and normally the lack of cohesiveness and bonds are much more prevalent within impoverish neighborhood (Kurbin, 2009). Moreover, residential migration (due to industrialization of a suburban area) will also lead to higher crime rates, as the

bonds and cohesiveness are much weak due to interruption and slow process of social integration and connectedness. These, portray the social disorganization in the community, and tendency of youth to be involved in delinquency is high within this disorganized community. Family financial problem and unstable structural condition are the key to youth delinquency (Agnew et al., 2008; Jacob, 2011; Reid, 2008) and it show the link of youth delinquency in the society.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



Therefore, through the literature review on economic condition and youth delinquency in the society; the aforementioned theories have shown the link that forms the relationship of youth delinquency from a sociological perspective. The studies showed that there are two driving forces that interrelates with youth delinquency within a social ecosystem (environment, community, family, economic conditions and demographic), which is the family financial problems and the environment. This is because the Anomie and Strain theory explains on how the family economic conditions (strain resources, inaccessible to immediate goals, and unequal opportunity gain) drives the youth to indulge more in deviant behavior. The reason to this is due to the financial burdens that the families are facing, which creates a chain reaction of negative changes in their belief system; the negative changes affect their children (youths), as the illegitimate acquisition of desired goals are imitated, creating a driving force (to the youth) to delinquent behavior (*Differential Association Theory*). The situations worsen as the cohesiveness or societal bonds are weakened in areas (neighborhood) where economic instability is prevalent, as different belief systems creates tensions; thus creating a laissez-faire approach (less community living and care) to community wellness (*Disorganization Society*). Not only that, the instability of this areas increases the probability of increasing youth delinquency as it creates immigration of unwanted visitors, and reduce in quality of life, which influence the state of families living in such of community to be more susceptible to violent crime (*Social Ecological*). Henceforth, this

framework explains the flow (and driving force) of youth delinquency behavior in the society, and the process is continuous since the economic condition is changes depending on the country's stability. This is why a working proposition that could be derived from this framework is that 1. *The economic and area stability (Environment)* and 2. *Family economic conditions* as factors that leads to youth delinquency in family and society.

### *Continuous of youth delinquency*

Youth delinquency is a continuous issue since economic problem is bound to happen in a society. Furthermore, when the country is facing an economic downturn, the impact of the labor market is critical due to the excessive amount workers but shrinking job demand. Due to this, the tendency of people to face unemployment, retrenchment, termination and force dismissal is high. Consequently, it affects the family institution, as individuals will have to face the burden of unable providing adequate basic needs for their family. As the result of deprivation; family faces distress due to unachievable desired (or immediate) goal, which increases the possibility of delinquent behavior (such as property and violent crime) (Agnew et al., 2008). The distress of financial burdens affects their children, as their youth imitates their parental attitude; therefore, inducing their delinquent behavior in the society.

Youth delinquent behavior is explained by the above theories because of the deviation of norm, lack of resource to achieve the goals (immediate goals), imitation of parental attitudes and lack of neighborhood cohesion. How is that economic condition lead youth to behave delinquently? It is because as parents face financial burdens; they are unable to fulfill their basic needs and their children's needs. Therefore, the possibility for them to indulge in violent crime increases because the rewards they are able to gain is able to ease their financial burdens (Jacob, 2011). Moreover, this illegitimate method of reward (goals) acquisition will affect their children as they imitate the negative attitude portrayed, as their family member was fostering it. The delinquency behavior is somehow intensified, as the community (neighborhood or society) does not care about what they do. Thus, this social disorganization leads youth to continuously behave delinquently in the society.

## **CONCLUSION**

Youth delinquency is not a new thing in the society; still there is no one theory that fits all when it comes to solving youth delinquency. However, the critical review of the theories will help researchers to better understand the social problem amongst youth. Linking several sociological theories under economic condition is good way to demonstrate the pattern of youth behavior in today's world in order to adapt (or modified) those classical views to better suit the modernize world. Henceforth, the theories used in this paper is still applicable today even though the environment is changing; since the purpose of this paper is to seek out the linkage between sociological theories and youth delinquency within the society (through classical and modern view). Furthermore, this paper also narrows the topic towards one aspect where the economy as the factor to explain the phenomenon. This discussion was limited to affected family in the crisis of economic and lived in the disorganization society. Future research should expand the study by

adding more factors in order to see the linkage of youth delinquency in the context of changing environment (demographic areas, non-industrialized areas, and rural areas) and youths from different socioeconomic classes to further extend the sociological perspective of the deviant behavior among youth.

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